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## THE MIND OF A GREAT THINKER.

*An Autobiography.* By Herbert Spencer. Two volumes. Pp., vol. i., xii+556; vol. ii., ix+542. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904.) Price 28s. net.

A GREAT and peculiar interest attaches to these volumes, because in them Herbert Spencer has displayed the steps of the evolution in his own mind of that great scheme of universal evolution which has so profoundly affected modern thought, and has described the mental characteristics that conducted to the conception and the working out of that scheme. Spencer was peculiarly well fitted for the task of self-revelation, and it may safely be said that never before have the mental processes by which a great thinker has produced a vast system of conceptions been so clearly exposed.

The exposition is scattered through more than a thousand pages of matter, much of which is trivial or redundant, and it is perhaps worth while to set down consecutively, and in what seems the order of relative importance, the peculiarities of the philosopher's mind and character which, according to his own account, played a principal part in making the synthetic philosophy just that which it is.

Spencer rightly claims that he possessed in an exceptional degree the three great faculties (1) of deductive synthesis; (2) of analysis, leading to the discovery in complex and seemingly widely different phenomena of the elements or features that they have in common, and so to the inductive verification of large deductions; (3) "the ability to discern inconspicuous analogies."

The first of these was conspicuously manifested at every stage of the development of the system, the earliest considerable display of it being the deduction from the "law of equal freedom" of the conclusions as to political and social institutions presented in "Social Statics." The second was early manifested in the famous essay on "The Universal Postulate," which aimed "to identify the common elements of all those beliefs . . . which we regard as having absolute validity." The third was brilliantly exercised in the discovery of that celebrated analogy which has now become incorporated in common speech in the phrase "the social organism."

These three powers were certainly present in very high degree, and the deductive and inductive tendencies preserved a balance such as is by no means common. But it is possible that many minds have equalled Spencer's in these respects, and the exceptional development of these powers would not have sufficed to give us the synthetic philosophy in the absence of certain other very strongly marked mental traits that contributed to render Spencer's mind peculiarly effective in the carrying out of the great work that he accomplished. Among these the first place must be assigned to the effective belief in universal causation according to immutable laws, a belief early acquired

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and constantly fostered by the questions put to young Spencer by his father, who rightly considered the leading to a search after causes to be the most important function of the educator. "A constant question with him was,—'I wonder what is the cause of so-and-so';—always the tendency in himself, and the tendency strengthened in me, was to regard everything as naturally caused." The "constitutional readiness to grasp the abstract necessity of causal relations" thus "rendered by practice unusually strong," Spencer himself seems to have regarded, probably rightly, as the most important feature of his intellectual equipment, just as the lack of development, and, in fact, the actual repression, of this tendency, strong in most children, was and still is the gravest defect of English education. Hardly less important was the supreme confidence in his own mental processes, amounting, indeed, to intellectual arrogance, which, at the age of twenty, rendered him desirous of making public "some of my ideas upon the state of the world and religion," and which, a much more exceptional fact, remained unimpaired throughout his long life. There can be no doubt that this was essential to his achievement; by the lack of such confidence many fine intellects are rendered sterile, and had Spencer not possessed it in a very remarkable degree, had he been ever so slightly infected with that diffidence which was so marked a trait of his friend, George Eliot, he would not even have embarked upon a literary career, or, if embarked, he must have remained comparatively unproductive.

Closely allied with this last, and still more closely allied with one another, were the three traits "disregard of authority," "the absence of moral fear," and the tendency to criticise rather than to appreciate, each carried to a very extraordinary pitch. These, generating a repugnance to every kind of statement based upon authority and not appealing to reason for its acceptance, seem to have determined the trend of intellectual activity from the earliest years, from the time when as a small boy Spencer refused to apply himself to the study of Latin or of other languages and at the age of thirteen years rejected the current definition of inertia, to the time when he set aside all religious authority, laid down Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" rejecting his doctrine of time and space "at once and absolutely" after reading a few pages only, set himself in "Man v. the State" in unqualified opposition to the dominant trend of political change, and criticised adversely the frescoes of Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel, the compositions of Raphael and of Wagner, the dialogues of Plato and the architecture of Venice.

Important, too, was his persistency in the pursuit of any end, his "tendency . . . to be enslaved by a plan once formed," frequently displayed throughout life in things both large and small. Without this natural persistency he would not have gone far towards the completion of his great scheme in the face of serious pecuniary difficulties and in spite of disturbances of health which, whether they were serious or not, certainly diminished very greatly his capacity for work. In boyhood this persistency was displayed very remark-

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ably when he walked from Hinton to Derby, a distance of more than one hundred miles, in three days almost without food or sleep, and its manifestation in later life is well illustrated by the statement that after the projection of the evolutionary system at the age of thirty-seven, "nearly everything I wrote had a bearing, direct or indirect, on the doctrine of evolution."

Among the characters of direct importance to his intellectual productiveness must be reckoned the freedom and spontaneity of his ideational processes. During boyhood trains of ideas were apt to occupy his attention for long periods excluding all awareness of his surroundings, and this seems to have been especially frequent during walking. He speaks of this free flow of ideas in boyhood as "castle-building," but names it "constructive imagination" when, in later life, owing to systematisation of interests, his ideational processes tended towards ends related to his general scheme of conceptions. This spontaneity of the ideational processes enabled him to reach his conceptions and conclusions with a minimum of voluntary effort and, indeed, his efforts were more often directed to the checking rather than, as with most of us, to the promoting of the flow of thought. The following passage describes this as well as another important mental trait.

"It has never been my way to set before myself a problem and puzzle out an answer. The conclusions at which I have from time to time arrived, have not been arrived at as solutions of questions raised; but have been arrived at unawares—each as the ultimate outcome of a body of thoughts which slowly grew from a germ. Some direct observation, or some fact met with in reading, would dwell with me: apparently because I had a sense of its significance. It was not that there arose a distinct consciousness of its general meaning; but rather that there was a kind of instinctive interest in those facts which have general meanings. For example, the detailed structure of this or that species of mammal . . . would leave little impression; but when I met with the statement that, almost without exception, mammals . . . have seven cervical vertebræ, this would strike me and be remembered as suggestive."

In this passage is indicated the last of the faculties of primary importance, the faculty of seizing upon facts or conceptions that were of significance for his scheme of thought, well illustrated by his adoption and extended application of von Baer's phrase "the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity." It was this subtle and ready working of selective attention that rendered unnecessary the storing in the memory of vast masses of facts, and enabled him to dispense with any very extensive reading. Spencer's "sporadic memory" was avowedly poor, and this fact, cooperating in youth with a constitutional idleness, a distaste for continued reading and an impatience of opinions with which he did not agree, and in later life cooperating with an incapacity for reading dating from the time of the writing of the "Psychology" (æt. 38), very effectively preserved him from that "accumulation of knowledge in excess of power to use it" which he deplored as one of the common results of the current educational methods and regarded as one of the principal sources of intellectual sterility in many

able men. It is an interesting question, How would Spencer's work have been modified had he devoted much time and energy to reading in place of passing restlessly from place to place, unable to bear solitude, constantly seeking to kill time, as he tells us, by various trivial occupations? Would extensive reading have choked the springs of production? There can be no doubt that, had his mental digestion proved equal to the task, a greater acquaintance with the history of thought would have enabled him to raise his works to a still higher level than that they actually attained—to secure for them an even more solid and enduring fame.

Of the further qualities that especially contributed to determine the character of his political and ethical doctrines, we may note a love of freedom, a quick sympathetic resentment of all injustice, a high valuation of pleasure for its own sake.

As to the general impression of the man produced by this autobiography, it seems certain that it is unduly harsh and unfavourable, for Spencer persisted with almost painful honesty and in accordance with the principle he had adopted, in laying stress upon the distinctive or peculiar features, while neglecting those more amiable traits which he shared with men in general. The result is that, whereas most biographies, and even autobiographies, are of the nature of a portrait, in which the artist selects an aspect and idealises to some extent the features of the subject, this one resembles rather a harsh, crude photograph that reproduces with relentless accuracy, and even gives undue prominence to, the lines and the warts, all the asperities of nature and all the bruises of the battle of life.

W. McD.

#### AMERICAN BIG GAME.

*Musk-Ox, Bison, Sheep, and Goat.* By C. Whitney and others. American Sportsman's Library. Pp. 284; illustrated. (New York: The Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904.) Price 8s. 6d. net.

*The Still-Hunter.* By T. S. Van Dyke. Pp. viii+390; illustrated. (New York: The Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904.) Price 7s. 6d. net.

THE members of the deer tribe, together with the pronghorned antelope, or prongbuck, having been described in an earlier volume of the same series, the work standing first in our list completes the account of the wild ruminants of North America. The names of the authors—Mr. C. Whitney for the musk-ox, Mr. G. B. Grinnell for the bison, and Mr. O. Wister for the mountain sheep and the white goat—form a sufficient guarantee that the text of this volume will combine that mixture of sport and natural history for which the true sportsman always looks in works of this nature, and a glance at its pages shows that such is really the case. From title-page to index the method of treatment and the style of writing are admirable, so admirable, indeed, that there is scarcely a sentence to which exception can be taken.

One admirable feature is that all three authors have